DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 430 990 TM 029 816

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TITLE Confluent Education, Multicultural Education, and New Standards for the 21st Century.
PUB DATE 1999-04-00
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 19-23, 1999).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Academic Standards; *Curriculum Development; Diversity (Student); Elementary Secondary Education; *Humanistic Education; *Multicultural Education
IDENTIFIERS *New Standards Project (LRDC)

ABSTRACT

This paper describes elements of the "New Standards" program that have been set for selected school districts across the United States and challenges people to assess how conceptions of "confluent education" and "multicultural education" may contribute to reaching the proposed new standards. The goal of the New Standards Project is to develop explicit standards for student performance in every grade and subject that are comparable with the highest around the world. "Confluent education" may be conceived of as "an engagement of students in spirited inquiry along paths continuously being mapped by scholars in each of the academic disciplines." The justified expansion of what counts as truth enriches confluent education. Appreciation of multicultural perspectives and advancement of curricula that adapt content and objectives as well as methods of instruction and evaluation to meet the learning needs of diverse students is at the heart of such enrichment, and will ensure that the "new standards" for the 21st century are well-grounded and content sensitive. (Contains 2 figures, a list of 31 resources, and 31 references.) (SLD)

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Confluent Education, Multicultural Education, and New Standards for the 21st Century

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Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Montreal Canada
April 1999

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Confluent Education, Multicultural Education, and New Standards for the 21st Century

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association, Montreal, April, 1999.

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In the early 1970s, Stewart Shapiro convened a committee of scholars to perform a rigorous "ordinary language analysis" of the term "confluent education." It was Shapiro who first clarified the role of substantive knowledge in "confluent education," distinguishing it from mere affective education and psychotherapy. His team of language analysts concluded that "confluent education" is "a deliberate, purposive evocation by responsible, identifiable agents of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and feelings which flow together to produce wholeness in the person and society" (1975, p. 119). As such, it is distinct from experience-base education, psychological education, affective education, emotional education, and personal growth methods, especially in that it includes: "1. external structure which integrates subject matter and personal awareness, 2. an intellectual component, and 3. abstract knowledge or information" (p. 118).

Shapiro subsequently (1998) portrayed the University of California, Santa Barbara, program in Confluent Education as one based largely on one person's (George Brown) interpretation of another person's (Fritz Perls) theory of psychology, which was not clearly related to the foundations of Gestalt Psychology. This esoteric interpretation, Shapiro claimed, was framed in terms to forestall critical examination, and was from the start at odds with the goals and dynamics of a research institution. Shapiro speculated that Confluent Education might have had a more lasting impact if it had evolved outside of academia, and if it had been applied to contexts other than schools, and he identified cases where elements of the program appear to be reflected, its marginal "legacy."

My own analyses of confluent education (Hackbarth, 1996a,b; 1997a,b,c), more along the lines drawn by Shapiro, have suggested that it may meaningfully and productively be conceived of as engagement of students in spirited inquiry along the paths continuously being mapped by scholars in each of the academic disciplines. The affective/psychomotor dimension of their experiences is embodied in their systematic modes of exploration. The cognitive dimension is embodied in subject matter and the emergence of new levels of comprehension and application, both for the individual and for humanity. (See Figure 1.) Thus, the process of confluent education as I conceive it is akin to social constructivism, but with a more solid grounding in our shared world as illuminated by systematic, multi-disciplinary inquiry.

As we enter the 21st century, with its promise of ever more intimate contacts across diverse world cultures, it may be productive to speculate how various conceptions of "confluent education" hold up in the context of schooling generally, and of multicultural education in particular. Shapiro concluded that the UCSB brand of confluent education seems to have been better suited to non-academic contexts. His own conception and mine would appear to fit well within such contexts. In this paper I describe elements of the "New Standards" that have been set for selected school districts across the country (including the one where I teach in Manhattan), and challenge each of us to assess how our own conceptions of "confluent education" and "multicultural education" may contribute to achieving them.

New Standards for the 21st Century

The New Standards Project evolved as the result of collaboration among the University of Pittsburgh, the National Center on Education and the Economy, and educators from across the U.S. The Project's goal is to develop explicit standards for student performance in every grade and subject that are comparable with the highest around the world. Necessary elements for success of standards-based learning have been identified by Project participants as:

- clearly defined performance standards that state what students must know and be able to do in each core area and at each grade level;
- authentic assessments that evaluate each student's progress relative to the standards and help teachers examine and refine their teaching;
- celebrations of achievements through exhibitions, displays, special events or other means that recognize students' accomplishments;
- sufficient time for all youngsters to achieve the high standards;
- expert instruction;
- thoughtful, focused approaches to professional development that will help all educators become highly effective practitioners in a standards-based system. (Marrapodi, 1998, p. 6)

Principles of Learning

The Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh synthesized the following "principles of learning" to guide teachers working withing the context of the New Standards Project.

Organize for effort. Hard work replaces aptitude as a determiner of success. Students are encouraged to work as hard as they need to for as long as they need in order to reach standards.

Clear expectations. Everyone is made aware of and understands the standards and expected levels of student achievement. Students are involved actively in setting goals and in evaluating their progress.

Recognition of accomplishment. Good quality student effort and performance are recognized and celebrated at regular intervals.

Fair and credible evaluations. Students are evaluated based on progress toward absolute standards rather than in comparison with one another. Assessments are connected to and embedded in curriculum and instruction.

Academic rigor in a thinking curriculum. Each subject has a curriculum that progressively deepens understanding of core concepts and is organized around major concepts specified in the standards. Students are expected to raise questions, solve problems, and think by doing challenging, high-level assignments. Teaching and assessment focus on student mastery of the core concepts contained in the standards.

Accountable talk. A substantial portion of classroom time involves students in peer or teacher-led discussions, questioning and probing that require students to use evidence and knowledge of content to support arguments, draw conclusions and develop ideas.

Socializing intelligence. The teacher communicates to students that they have an obligation and a right to understand and make sense of the world and in order to do this they must constantly and consciously use the skills and strategies of intelligent thinking to become better learners.
Learning as apprenticeship. Teachers and other experts from the community engage, guide and assist students in the creation of "authentic" products and performances. Students are motivated to do the high-quality work that demonstrates complex thinking and organized learning because of the value placed on their work by interested and critical audiences. Apprentice forms of learning are particularly suitable for applied learning and school-to-work situations.

Standards-Based Instruction

Within the context of the New Standards Project, teachers focus both on skills of intelligent thought and knowledge of content areas. Students must demonstrate what they know and what they are able to do. Teachers focus on student work and assess student progress, understanding and content knowledge. If students are not performing up to the standards, teachers must refine the tasks, assignments and activities. Teachers engage students in active reasoning about core concepts and support progress toward the standards.

Standards-based assessments are usually characterized by: (1) open-ended questions that require knowledge of content, (2) demonstrations of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, and (3) applications to real-life situations. Students must demonstrate ability to listen attentively and to read with comprehension through a wide range of oral and written tasks such as speeches, essays, exhibitions, science experiments, and written analyses of mathematical computations.

Challenges to the New Standards Project

As is typical of school reform, the New Standards Project evolved largely outside of the contexts in which it has been applied. Challenges to the top-down imposition of such efforts have appeared, for example, in a recent issue of the *Phi Delta Kappan* where distinctions were made between school renewal and reform. Soder (1999) asserted that in many major reform efforts:

> . . . we find a rather complacent acceptance or even affirmation of given class and other social structures. The operant world view . . . would seem to be "don't rock the boat," with no need for explicit attention to such fundamental issues as social injustice, racism, sexism, "savage inequalities," and like matters. Renewal efforts, on the other hand, tend toward an alternative world view. Matters of justice, equity, diversity, access to knowledge, shared power, democracy . . . and so forth are often explicit issues to be worked on over the long haul. (p. 568)

Goodlad (1999) observed that: "The language of school reform virtually eschews reference to the maturing of the self into greater wisdom, civility, civic-mindedness, democratic character, and participation in the whole of the human conversation" (p. 576). "It says little or nothing about the nature of education, the self, or the human community. Through sheer omission it dehumanizes" (p. 574). "School renewal is a much different game. The language is multidimensional. . . [and] relatively free of . . . the linearity of specified ends, means, and outcomes. . . . [It] is a language of the self and reflects a supportive and caring ethos. . ." (p. 575). Noddings (1999) maintained that "In contrast to systematic reform efforts, programs aimed at renewal identify the central purposes

and processes of democratic education, attempt to interpret them in contemporary terms, and seek to strengthen them" (p. 579). Reform efforts, according to Noddings, "often fall short in promoting the discourse that lies at the heart of education in a liberal democracy: What *experience* do students need in order to become engaged participants in democratic life" (p. 579)? She concluded that: "When liberal discussion is used to promote inquiry, critical thinking, reflective commitment, and personal autonomy, students are likely to feel more in control of their own schooling. . . . In an adequately politicized classroom, students may begin to experience school as a place to which they can bring some meaning. School will no longer be experienced as a compulsory act in a theater of the absurd" (p. 583).

From my limited experience as a specialist teacher spread between two schools, it appears that the New Standards Project exhibits more features of reform than of renewal. I understand that it has benefited from the input of a broad spectrum of educators. However, in my experience, it has been presented to teachers in a manner that may be characterized as primarily "top-down." Although my school district and teachers' union might well have eagerly bought into the Project, individual teachers are not given an option. The handouts, newsletters, and workshops I have witnessed focus largely on imposing a pre-packaged set of principles and guidelines, decontextualized from their philosophical assumptions, cultural and historical situations, and value systems. Teachers apparently are being observed and evaluated in terms that have been imposed rather than discussed, negotiated, adapted, and appropriated.

From my perspective, the New Standards are presented as lacking in feet, heart, and hands. Focus is on the nature of learning, knowledge, and assessment (epistemology), but I have seen little mention of assumptions about the nature of being human (cosmology) or what it means to be moral, happy or aesthetically pleasing (axiology), nor what content and activities ought to have priority. I would expect, for example, to have heard something about what children most need, not just in terms of intellectual stimulation, but emotional, moral, and spiritual growth as well, especially in the context of increasing school violence. And explication of philosophical premises would have served to resolve such apparent paradoxes as focus upon specified content and performance standards within the context of a "child-centered" curriculum. I have been assured, however, that classroom teachers are involved much more in dialogues about suitable content methods than I have witnessed personally.

Inasmuch as confluent education has been explicitly grounded and appears to be largely consistent with the New Standards and its "principles of learning," it may serve as a philosophical foundation for the Project. Inasmuch as multicultural education has brought to light historical and cultural contexts and epistemologies, it too may inform the Project. Thus, these more richly developed branches of education contribute not only to each other, but to the grounding and contextualizing of such school reform efforts as the New Standards Project. Rather than being imposed upon teachers as dogma, school reform efforts should be presented with their assumptions and values made explicit and open to challenge and negotiation. Teachers then would be made participants in a process rather than puppets in a play. They would have the opportunity to "buy in," to appropriate, and to gain the sense of ownership so critical to genuine school renewal. I have been assured that implementers of the New Standards Project have attended to these issues, and I have urged them to expand upon their efforts in these domains with

special attention to the "feelings of teachers" and the "culture of each school." I expect that these dimensions have been evolving and will continue to do so.

Building Bridges Between Confluent and Multicultural Education

My own analysis of what counts as knowledge within the context of confluent education has expanded along with my better understanding and appreciation of modes of disciplinary and interdisciplinary inquiry. We have welcomed more qualitative, participatory methods, and have included critical analyses, oral histories, narratives, intersubjective judgments, literary and aesthetic experiences (e.g., art, drama, dance, music), and social constructions (e.g., critical dialogue or "pedagogy"). Claims now are being made for the validity of more intuitive forms of knowledge and for truths that can be fully comprehended only within the contexts of distinctive cultural perspectives (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Each claim needs to be subjected to scrutiny, applying sensitively first of all intrinsic criteria (e.g., validity within a given context, representativeness of views expressed), and only then extrinsic (e.g., clarity, consistency, coherence, parsimony).

Take natural science, for example. As I have described elsewhere (1996a,b; 1997a,b,c), the methods that characterize each specialty are distinctive and non-arbitrary. The U.S. *National Science Education Standards* contrast the "scientific world view" generally with alternative views: "Explanations on how the natural world changes based on myths, personal beliefs, religious values, mystical inspiration, superstition, or authority may be personally useful and socially relevant, but they are not scientific" (National Research Council, 1996, p. 201). A major challenge of multicultural education is not so much to broaden further the concept of science as it is to **enable all children** "to use empirical standards, logical arguments, skepticism, questioning, and rules of evidence" even when these may conflict with "cultural expectations of cooperation, social and emotional support, consensus-building, and respect for authority. . . . Because it promotes fundamental literacy development as practiced by the mainstream, the cultivation of scientific habits of mind may be one of the most important contributions that science learning can offer" (Lee & Fradd, 1998, pp. 18-19). "**Instructional congruence**" is achieved when teachers successfully "build on students' [linguistic and cultural] background experiences while promoting new ways of understanding and communicating about academic subjects" (Lee & Fradd, 1998, p. 19; Descy, 1998).

Cline and Necochea (1996) made a similar case for the integrity of a set of "core values" across all cultural groups, echoing the well-argued claims of such theologians as C. S. Lewis (*Mere Christianity*, 1958) and pols such as William Bennett (*The Book of Virtues*, 1993). As with the "scientific world view," core values too often have been imposed by school teachers in ways that conflict with the perspectives and preferred learning styles of non-Anglo children and their families (e.g., see Cline, 1998). For Cline and Necochea (1996; see also Hollins & Oliver, 1999), instructional congruence in character education is best achieved by:

- asking parents to contribute their own family stories that reflect core values;
- using folktales and idioms from around the world;

- incorporating discussions of the various "surface manifestations" (behaviors) found among students;
- seeking culturally sensitive ways of evaluating student progress;
- celebrating and embracing the diversity of students.

The case for non-arbitrary intellectual and moral foundations also is reflected in George Kneller's seasoned observations when he cautioned that:

> If students cannot transcend their tradition, they cannot tell whether it is better or worse than any other. This may not seem to matter much, provided they are educated to reflect on their tradition and be disposed to improve it. . . . If students are exposed to a range of cultures and contemporary works, with no traditional standards to show why these are more important than others, they may well come to believe that moral and intellectual principles are matters of personal taste. . . . that nothing *profoundly* matters (1984, p. 98).

Could such lack of firm foundations explain some of the apparent nihilism we witness today among our youths? In an age of cultural relativism, are teachers reluctant to take a stand, and to serve as culturally grounded, yet multiculturally sensitive models to be emulated? Will the search for common grounds between multiculturalism and confluent education courageously seek and celebrate the Truth in each? Clearly, confluent education as I conceive it allows for strong links with multicultural education, especially in the area of epistemology, how knowledge is acquired. (See Figure 2.)

Conclusions

Confluent education arose in the context of Carl Roger's *Freedom to Learn* and A. S. Neil's *Summerhill*. Talk about "performance standards" was maligned as a form of animal training. The production line conception of schooling was condemned as dehumanizing.

The New Standards Project is a response to comparisons between the U.S. and other industrialized nations of students' test scores in a variety of subjects. We are living in a revival of the post-Sputnik era. Employers and politicians are having their impacts on the 21st Century curriculum, now in more intimate collaboration with professional educators.

Challenges for confluent educators are to examine their assumptions and values, clarify their conceptions of teaching and learning, and ascertain what role they may play in those schools that have adopted the New Standards and other such performance-based frameworks. A conception of confluent education as spirited, multi-disciplinary inquiry appears to fit well within the New Standards framework for 21st century schools, and one that advocates culturally sensitive and enriched methods of inquiry has a close affinity with multicultural education.

Inasmuch as confluent education is, by definition, concerned with the nature of knowledge, **justified** expansion of what counts as truth enriches confluent education. **Appreciation of multicultural perspectives and advancement of curriculums that adapt content and objectives as well as methods of instruction and evaluation to meet the learning needs of diverse students go to the heart of such enrichment.** However, carelessly opening the gates of epistemological and ethical relativism would greatly diminish confluent education. A theoretical perspective that admits even just one clear instance is more meaningful than one that excludes none, I believe.

As we reflect upon education for the 21st century, let us open our hearts and minds (and spirits, if you will) to the contributions that diverse cultures can make to the theory and practice of confluent education, and to the processes of educational renewal generally. With Necochea and Cline (1999), my hope is that the cross fertilization of ideas across confluent and multicultural education will serve to address the issue of **equity of school access and outcomes**, and that "policymakers, practitioners, and researchers [will] work collaboratively to improve free public education. . . , **guided by insightful theoretical underpinnings that address the issues and concerns of socially constructed knowledge using eclectic modes of inquiry**" (p. 5, emphasis added). Together we advocate spirited methods of inquiry that incorporate diverse multicultural perspectives, and that lead to rich, reliable insights across the disciplines that make up school curriculums. Engagement in such methods by students and teachers, and involving parents and administrators, will ensure achievement of well grounded and context sensitive "new standards" for the 21st century.

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Latino/Chicano/Hispanic Resources (www.at-la.com/@la-lat.htm)
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Confluent Education Today (unofficial site) (members.aol.com/confluent)
Educational Technology Resources (hometown.aol.com/hackbarths)
Web Links for Teachers (hometown.aol.com/shnyc) lists several multicultural sites.

Figure 1. The integration of cognitive (subject matter, knowledge) and affective/psychomotor dimensions of learning is the defining goal of confluent education in the context of schooling. One means of achieving it is to engage students in spirited, culturally enriched quests for personally and socially significant knowledge employing methods that characterize the academic disciplines, with the aim of applying what is learned in ethical, culturally sensitive ways.

Relations Between Confluent and Multicultural Education

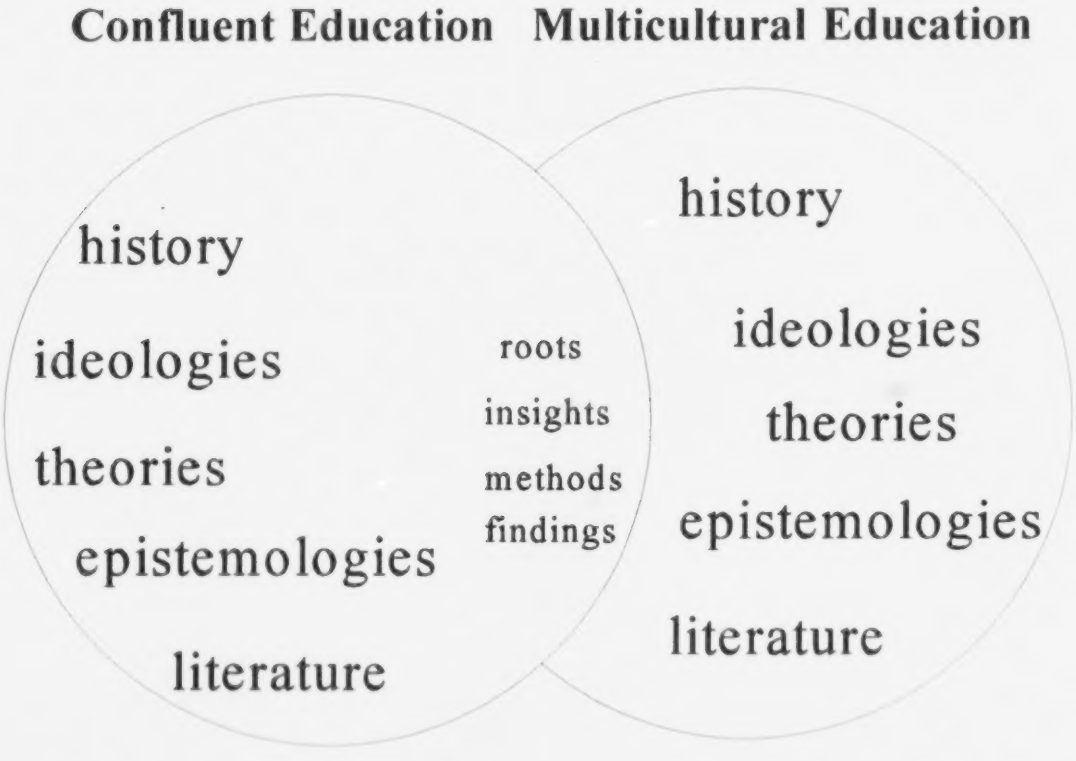

Figure 2. Confluent and multicultural education have distinctive histories, ideologies, theories, epistemologies, and bodies of literature. Among the epistemological approaches that have distinguished multicultural education are oral history, narratives, ethnographies, and participatory methods of inquiry. These especially have served to enrich confluent education as well, along with shared roots, insights, and findings.